"WE LIVE AT HOME, QUIET, CONFINED": JANE AUSTEN'S "VINDICATION" OF WOMEN'S RIGHT TO BE ACTIVE AND HEALTHY*

AKIKO TAKEI

> She began to talk of a serious Illness, her two last having been preceded by the same symptoms; — but thank Heaven! she is now quite as well as one can expect her to be in Weather, which deprives her of Exercise. — Jane Austen, To Cassandra Austen, 17 January 1809
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> I am got tolerably well again, quite equal to walking about & enjoying the Air; & by sitting down & resting a good while between my Walks, I get exercise enough. — Jane Austen, To Fanny Knight, 13 March 1817

In Jane Austen's all novels, the debate between Anne Elliot and Captain Harville in Volume 2, Chapter 11 of *Persuasion* is the only scene to clearly note inborn and social difference between men and women. Let me begin this article by examining the meaning of Anne's famous remark (used as the title of the article), "We live at home, quiet, confined" (*P* 232). This remark has been understood as women's exclusion from the social activities such as education and a profitable occupation. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar observe that Anne discusses "her sense of exclusion from patriarchal culture" (179). However, turning attention to the disparity in the availability of active sports for the two sexes, we can find that this remark actually means women's inactive lifestyle.

To support this argument, I would like to present some textual

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evidence. In *Sense and Sensibility*, we read that "Sir John was a sportsman, Lady Middleton a mother. He hunted and shot, and she humoured her children; and these were their only resources" (*SS* 32). In *Persuasion*, a daily routine of the Musgrove males is comprised of "their own game to guard, and to destroy; their own horses, dogs, and newspapers to engage them" (*P* 42); on the other hand, the women's concerns are "housekeeping, neighbours, dress, dancing, and music" (*P* 43). We are told that one morning at Uppercross, Anne and Mary are "sitting quietly at work" (*P* 83), while Musgrove and Wentworth are going shooting. Subtle as Austen's descriptions are, they point not just to women's exclusion from field sports but also to indoor activities and domestic roles which women were expected to engage in.

In eighteenth-century medicine, outdoor exercise was recommended to preserve health. However, as Austen sharply detects, its options and amount were intimately influenced by gender politics. Nevertheless, in the studies of Austen, women's sports and exercise have not drawn scholarly attentions. David Selwyn refers to outdoor sports Austen's male characters enjoy, and to their historical background. On the other hand, the description of women's outdoor activities comes in only two paragraphs, where the examples of Elizabeth Bennet's walk to Netherfield and Jane Fairfax's walk in the rain are taken to explain the anomalousness of a woman's solitary walk (89). Yet, this does not develop into a discussion about a social imperative which kept women away from active sports and exercise. Thus, with references to representative arguments on women's physical strength and activities during the period, this article examines how Austen's women manage to take exercise and discusses her handling of exercise as regimen, as an epitome of inequality between the sexes, and, eventually as the woman's right to be active and healthy.

Limited Options for Outdoor Exercise

In the eighteenth century, the opportunities for and means of women's physical activities were very different depending on their classes. Allen Guttmann and Betty Rizzo argue that middle-class women had the fewest opportunities for sports, and their sanctioned options were limited to walking and riding (Guttmann 83; Rizzo 72). On the other hand, without being censured, working-class women could join as many sports and

much as men. Upper-class women fared better than middle-class women in that although not unconditionally sanctioned, some could join in field sports, and they had more options. In addition to field sports, Rizzo identifies driving a carriage, racing, ice-skating, and archery as fashionable ladies' major outdoor sports (83, 85–90).[1]

In medical books published in Austen's time, walking and riding were overwhelmingly recommended as active outdoor exercise because these books primarily targeted a middle-class readership. In the eighteenth edition of *Domestic Medicine* (1803), the best-selling medical manual throughout the eighteenth century, William Buchan (1729–1805) says, "Let any one who has been accustomed to lie a bed till eight or nine o'clock, rise by six or seven, spend a couple of hours in walking, riding, or any active diversion without doors, and he will find his spirits cheerful and serene through the day, his appetite keen, and his body braced and strengthened" (79).[2] Exercise is useful also in disciplining the mind. In *A View of the Nervous Temperament* (1807), Thomas Trotter (1760–1832), a Scottish physician, assures that "[a] degree of vigor and fortitude of mind is insensibly acquired by being exposed to the weather" (238). In this, the interdependence of strength in the body and mind is medically corroborated.

Precisely reflecting middle-class women's few options, in Austen's world, women's outdoor exercise is mainly walking, and horsewomen are not many. The reasons for the popularity of walking are evidently that it is free of charge, and that it can be begun immediately. Austen's healthy women joyfully walk and Elizabeth's long walk in *Pride and Prejudice* is the most notable and famous, vividly exhibiting her health and liveliness. She walks "at a quick pace" and "with impatient activity," repeatedly "jumping" and "springing" (*PP* 32). At first, Darcy is skeptical of Elizabeth's motive for "coming so far alone" (*PP* 33), but he admires her complex-

[1] These are textual evidence of Austen's knowledge of upper-class women's modish sports. In *The Watsons*, being invited to dinner by Margaret Watson, Tom Musgrave makes an equivocal reply on account of his promise to go shooting with Lady Osborne. In *Mansfield Park*, before leaving for Sotherton Court, Mrs Grant says that Julia Bertram wishes to learn to drive and proposes that she should sit next to Henry Crawford in his carriage.

[2] William Buchan was born in Scotland and took the degree of MD in the University of Edinburgh. He worked for the Foundling Hospital in Yorkshire, practiced in Sheffield, and later in London. *Domestic Medicine* was originally published in 1769 and printed in nineteen editions in Britain by the time of Buchan's death.

ion "glowing with the warmth of exercise" (*PP* 32). Certainly, rosy cheeks after exercise typify good health: in 1777, John Leake, the founder of the Westminster Lying-in Hospital, observed, "*Exercise*, by walking in a dry, fresh air, is remarkably beneficial to those of weak solids, and a pale, watery blood; for it perceptibly increases their strength, and renders the face more *florid*" (425). In *Emma*, we read that Emma Woodhouse makes it a regular habit to take a walk: "Though now the middle of December, there had yet been no weather to prevent the young ladies from tolerably regular exercise" (*E* 83). Moreover, frail women walk to improve their health. In "Amelia Webster," Benjamin purposefully puts a love letter to Sally in a tree far away from her house so that she can walk sufficiently: he writes, "I considered that the walk would be of benefit to you in your weak & uncertain state of Health" (*MW* 48). In *Emma*, Jane Fairfax walks to the local post office every day on the pretext of a doctor's advice. Apart from Fanny Price's walks enforced by Mrs Norris in *Mansfield Park*, walking in the open air enlivens women.

As seen in the following examples, taking a walk is also a reasonable excuse for women to leave their unpleasant home diplomatically. On her way to Netherfield, in spite of worrying about Jane's ailment, Elizabeth's springing and jumping seem to signal her joy of being away from her silly mother and sisters. As John Wiltshire points out (116), Jane Fairfax's love- and health-oriented walking functions as her only opportunity for getting out of the suffocating small parlor and being away from Mrs and Miss Bates. They are good-natured and affectionate, but, still, staying indoors all day with her half-senile grandmother and extremely loose-tongued aunt is harsh to Jane, who is under the pressure of her secret engagement and of her uncertain prospect of marriage. Mrs Weston does not know the truth, but she is aware of Jane's reluctance to stay at home: she says sympathetically, "We cannot suppose that she has any great enjoyment at the Vicarage, my dear Emma — but it is better than being always at home. Her aunt is a good creature, but, as a constant companion, must be very tiresome" (*E* 285–86). Likewise, Anne's daily visit to Lady Russell enables her to be away from her unaffectionate family for a while. When Sir Walter Elliot and Mr Shepherd refer to Wentworth's clergyman brother, in quest of "the comfort of cool air for her flushed cheeks" (*P* 25), she escapes to her favourite walking route in her home ground. Her quick reaction hints that she has very often done alike when

she is oppressed by her family. Staying indoors all day is very frustrating even for Austen's most frail heroine, Fanny Price. Spending all afternoon with Mrs Norris, unsurprisingly, by the evening she becomes "worn down" (*MP* 267) and feels "incapable of happiness" (*MP* 267). Edmund Bertram wonders why she looks tired and wretched, and at first he surmises that she has been walking too long. But, on learning that she has been kept in, he says, "Then you have had fatigues within doors, which are worse. You had better have gone out" (*MP* 268). It is evident that he has not experienced and cannot even think of home-produced stress. These behavioral patterns indicate how difficult it was for women to be absent from home, while men were free to go everywhere.

Significantly, even among women of the same age group, the degree of their access to outdoor exercise is definitely in proportion to their social power. To put it strongly, women's right to take outdoor exercise depends on their right to do whatever they wish because women's going outside home means leaving their traditional domain, both literally and figuratively. To prove this, let me compare Emma Woodhouse with Jane Fairfax. Although Emma's means of outdoor exercise is limited to walking and she needs a companion for maintaining her propriety, her solitary walk to the Westons is not censured at all. After her governess Miss Taylor leaves Hartfield, she gains Harriet Smith as a companion relatively soon. Also for Jane, walking is the only means of keeping herself fit. But, as seen in these examples, her walks are always interfered with, and become a target of gossip: as soon as John Knightley refers to her walk to the post office in the rain, she is subject to the officious advice of Mr Woodhouse and Mrs Elton. While Jane is suffering from a nervous disorder, Emma half-forcibly tries to take her out for a walk for a "change of air and scene" (*E* 390); after Emma's persuasion is declined, Jane is seen "wandering about the meadows" (*E* 391); soon this is known to Emma and she is displeased.

Roger Sales points out the inseparable link between Jane's social powerlessness and her immobility (156–57). It is true that she can do nothing as she likes: she cannot announce her engagement and marry immediately; she has to go back to her less comfortable home; she cannot have an agreeable female friend; and she has to accept Mrs Elton's unwelcome offer of a governess's post. Walking in the bad weather is certainly inadvisable, but, when compared with Emma, Jane's

restricted freedom is evident. In addition to the uncertain prospect of her marriage, the stress of being constantly meddled with is influential in inducing her nervousness. Jane's burst of emotion, such as "I am fatigued; but it is not the sort of fatigue — quick walking will refresh me. — Miss Woodhouse, we all know at times what it is to be wearied in spirits. Mine, I confess, are exhausted" (*E* 363); "Oh! Miss Woodhouse, the comfort of being sometimes alone!" (*E* 363), represents frustration commonly felt by marginalized women towards their limited choices in social and physical activities.

The Appreciation of a Woman's Delicate Body

In such a circumstance, Elizabeth's solitary long walk is exceptionally revolutionary. Claudia L. Johnson holds that "Elizabeth's celebrated liveliness is vigorously physical as well, verging sometimes on unladylike athleticism. . . . Austen's manifestly self-conscious achievement in Elizabeth Bennet thus consists precisely in having made her 'creature' so 'delightful' despite her continual infractions of the rules of propriety" (76). Elizabeth's physical vitality is clearly sanctioned by Austen as an index of her strong mind and moral tenacity. Darcy eventually appreciates her sibling love, by which she is motivated to walk. However, the "great deal of surprise" (*PP* 32) Elizabeth provokes in the parlor of the Bingleys speaks for the revulsion which men in Austen's time felt against women's good health.

As grasped in Anne Elliot's comment that "[m]en have had every advantage of us [women] in telling their own story. . . . the pen has been in their hands" (*P* 234), with Aristotle, men repeatedly wrote of women's inborn physical weakness and ascribed it to reproduction. In the beginning of his treatise on women's poor health (published in 1809), Alexander Hamilton, Professor of Midwifery in the University of Edinburgh, says, "WOMEN are subject to many diseases in consequence of peculiarity of sex. Some of these, by inducing troublesome symptoms, render life uncomfortable; and many, by affecting the general health, prove the source of the most dangerous symptoms" (1). The beginning of the chapter on pregnancy notes that "[p]regnancy is, in civilized society, the source of many disagreeable sensations, and often the cause of diseases which might be attended with the worst consequences, if not properly

treated" (54). To make matters worse, after childbirth, women are as vulnerable to diseases as ever.

Moreover, from the mid-eighteenth century, the structure of nerves and muscles became influential in the medical analysis of women. In 1761, Robert Whytt (1714–66), Professor of Medicine in the University of Edinburgh, observed: "the frequent palpitations of the heart, from slight causes, in those women who are possessed of a very delicate nervous system, as well as many other facts that might be mentioned, shew that the irritability of the heart in different persons, is proportional to its sensibility" (53). In this, the concept of sensibility and irritability fits together to label women the weaker sex.

The medical definition of women's weak bodies was shared by eighteenth-century conduct-book writers. By speaking in high terms of women's physical weakness as a ladylike quality, they had much expertise in disguising their sexism. As seen in the following examples, "delicate" and "soft" were the buzzwords used in the descriptions of the womanly constitution. In *Sermons to Young Women* (1766), one of the best-known conduct books, James Fordyce pronounces, "Nature has endowed the greater part of the sex with a constitutional Softness, which, under right direction, would render them unspeakably more pleasing than any possible attraction that is purely external" (2: 235). In *A Father's Legacy to His Daughters* (1774), John Gregory likewise comments, "We so naturally associate the idea of female softness and delicacy with a correspondent delicacy of constitution, that when a woman speaks of her great strength, her extraordinary appetite, her ability to bear excessive fatigue, we recoil at the description in a way she is little aware of" (23).

Like physicians, conduct-book writers advised women to take exercise to maintain health. However, in reality, genteel women should take exercise within limits which did not violate womanly delicacy, never as vigorously as men. For example, in *An Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex* (originally published in 1796), Thomas Gisborne asserts, "It is not necessary that girls should contend in the hardy amusements which befit the youth of the other sex" (94). Thus, women's joining in field sports was considered unfeminine and inappropriate. Again we have Gisborne's assertion that "the rude clamour, the boisterous exertions, and the cruel spectacles of field sports, are wholly discordant, when contrasted with the delicacy, the refinement, and the sensibility of a woman" (209). As well as

in the choice of sports, women should be modest in displaying their health. Gregory's advice says, "But though good health be one of the greatest blessings of life, never make a boast of it, but enjoy it in grateful silence" (23). Conduct-book writers recommended moderate exercise only so that women should arrange a compromise between womanly softness on the one hand, and health on the other; in brief, women should be healthy without losing their delicate constitution. These discourses are clearly echoed in the scene in *Pride and Prejudice* where Elizabeth's walking is censured and ridiculed by the Bingley sisters (and mildly criticized by Darcy); three miles were beyond an appropriate distance for a woman's moderate exercise and Elizabeth makes her excellent health and spirits evident.

It was the equation of constitutional weakness with rank, and the upward tendency of the middle classes that produced and spread such an odd and inconsistent view of women's health. For this, physicians were responsible because they contrasted poor health among the upper classes and good health among the lower classes. Alison Lurie explains the general view of the relationship between health and rank in those days: "Physical slightness and fragility were admired, and what was now called 'rude health' was considered coarse and lower-class. To be pale and delicate, to blush and faint readily and lie about on sofas was ladylike; strength and vigor were the characteristics of vulgar, red-cheeked, thick-waisted servants and factory girls" (216). In Austen's writings, this view is disapproved of, but, as seen in the Bingley sisters' reaction to Elizabeth's walk, it was accepted also by women. They disparagingly say that Elizabeth "really looked almost wild" (*PP* 35), and that her walk typifies "an abominable sort of conceited independence, a most country town indifference to decorum" (*PP* 36). Obviously, Miss Bingley differentiates herself from Elizabeth, and she wants to make Darcy think that Elizabeth is vulgar and ill-bred, thus unworthy for him. The enemy to women's vigorous physical exercise was found in their sex as well as in the other sex.

Counterargument by Women Writers

However, elite women did not unthinkingly accept their enforced inactivity. According to Catherine H. Decker, women's health was a

controversial theme for eighteenth-century women writers such as Mary Wollstonecraft, Priscilla Wakefield, and Elizabeth Hamilton (n.pag.) In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792, hereafter referred to as *Vindication*), Wollstonecraft repeatedly problematizes the prevailing opinion of women's delicate bodies, the poor amount of outdoor exercise they take, and eventually their education. The main points of her argument are that soundness in the body and mind is reciprocal; that women's acquisition of physical strength, far from unsexing them, adds true beauty and grace

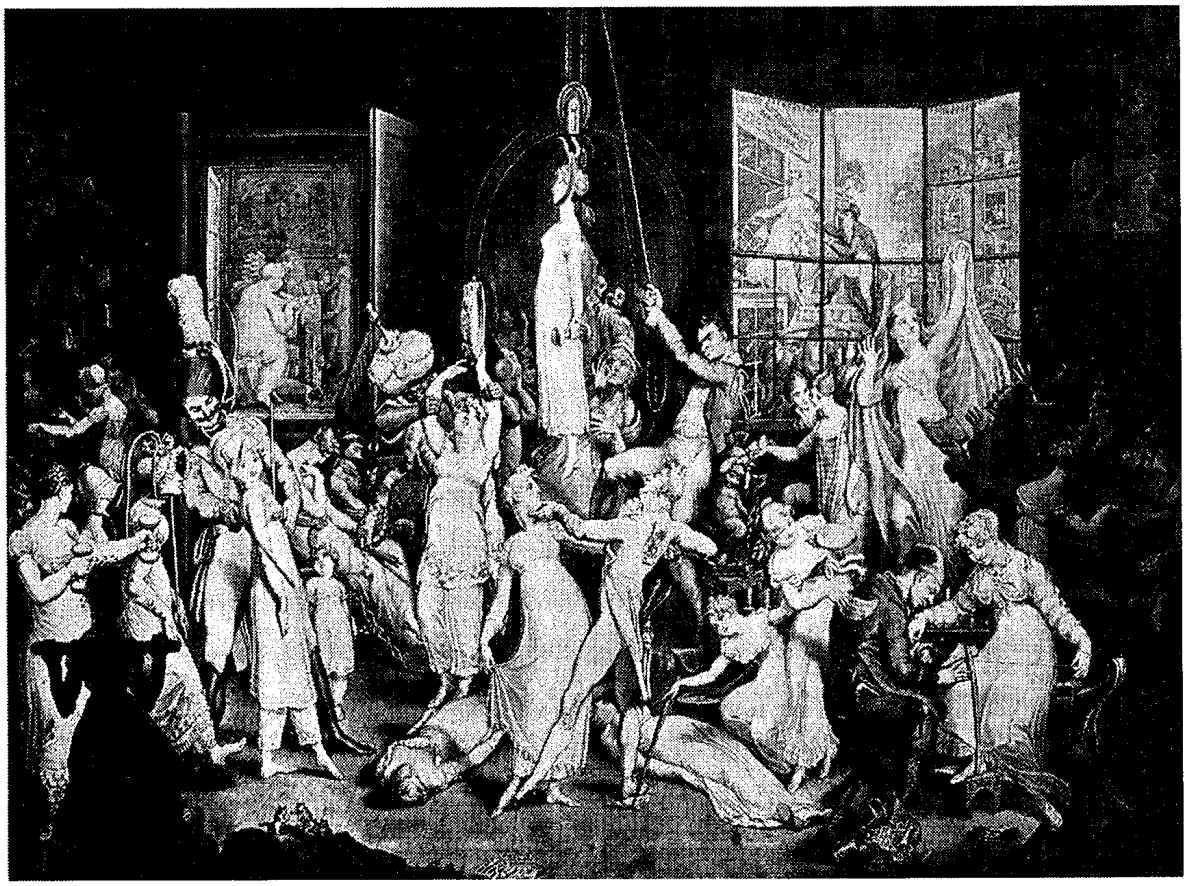

Illustration 1
"An Elegant Establishment for Young Ladies," by Edward Francis Burney (date unknown)

In the centre (top and bottom) and at the lower left, girls are trying to correct their postures by various methods: being hoisted by the chin, lying on their backs on the floor, holding a backboard behind the shoulders, and working out with dumbbells. Wollstonecraft argues that the false notion of beauty deprives women of opportunities for moving their bodies actively outdoors. In the same vein, in *Emma* Austen expresses her disapproval of fashionable ladies' schools.

to them; that the current education which forces girls and women to be sedentary and inactive is inadvisable (see Illustration 1); that they should take the same amount of exercise as boys and men. Although Wollstonecraft admits men's superiority in naturally endowed physical strength, she claims that by strengthening their bodies, women could be independent and the gap between the sexes reduced:

> Men have superior strength of body; but were it not for mistaken notions of beauty, women would acquire sufficient to enable them to earn their own subsistence, the true definition of independence; and to bear those bodily inconveniences and exertions that are requisite to strengthen the mind. Let us then, by being allowed to take the same exercise as boys, not only during infancy, but youth, arrive at perfection of body, that we may know how far the natural superiority of man extends. (185)

Wollstonecraft is sure that women's independence is hampered by a belief in their physical weakness, that women themselves are also responsible for their subjection, and that they should exercise their bodies. Equality in taking exercise is a paradigm of the women's rights Wollstonecraft has to vindicate.

Wollstonecraft's view is shared by Priscilla Wakefield in a milder and more practical form in *Reflections on the Present Condition of the Female Sex* (originally published in 1798). The third chapter of this book is on how to preserve health and its contents strikingly overlap with medical manuals. Unlike Wollstonecraft, Wakefield undeniably has a tendency to accommodate herself to the general assumption. For instance, to the opinion that exercise renders women unfeminine, Wakefield says, "their natural inferiority in strength, and the indispositions incident to childbearing, will too often secure the feminine delicacy of their persons and constitutions, and prevent them from acquiring more vigour than is requisite for the performance of the active duties of the mother and the mistress of a family" (20). However, she also refers to interrelation between the body and mind. Her concern is primarily directed to children's health. In the bulk of this chapter, she argues that girls should take outdoor exercise as much as boys, and she recommends early hours, simple and moderate diet, and cold bathing.

It is worth paying attention to the common tactics of Wollstonecraft and Wakefield, in the aim of setting the upper- and middle-class readers

to accept their argument. Firstly, both view men's natural physical strength as a matter of fact. But, they encourage women to be stronger and to eradicate the conventional association of physical vitality with low origin and coarseness. Wollstonecraft writes, "I find that strength of mind has in most cases been accompanied by superior strength of body, — natural soundness of constitution, — not that robust tone of nerves and vigour of muscles, which arise from bodily labour, when the mind is quiescent, or only directs the hands" (124). Wakefield holds that "an over anxiety for the delicacy of her complexion, or the apprehension of her becoming a romp" (24) enfeebles a girl and that active outdoor exercise is "by no means incompatible with delicacy of person or manners" (25). Then, probably to refute the opinion that exercise unsexes women, they claim that a strong mind and body are necessary to perform a woman's duty as a wife and a mother. Wollstonecraft questions, "how can she be a good wife or mother, the greater part of whose time is employed to guard against or endure sickness?" (131). Wakefield observes, "The manners of our women of fashion are but ill calculated to prevent the degeneracy of the species: an object of great importance to the public welfare. Crowded rooms, late hours, luxurious tables, and slothful inactivity, must contribute to the production of a puny offspring, inadequate to the noble energies of patriotism and virtue" (21). In short, Wollstonecraft and Wakefield assert that women have to be healthy to engage in their normative tasks, rather than for their sake. This typifies their limitation as feminists. Katharine M. Rogers's comment makes this point clear: "This assumption that woman was created for others, with the assumptions about woman's nature that justified it, unfortunately prevailed through the period, influencing the thought even of otherwise feminist writers" (37). Various reasons and grounds were needed to justify upper- and middle-class women's entitlement to physical exercise.

The Pleasure of Dancing

The efforts and need to take outdoor exercise practiced by Austen's women and argued by the feminists testify that well-informed women understood its benefit. However, in cold seasons and bad weather, women have to stay indoors; otherwise, like Jane Bennet, they run risk of catching colds. When outdoor exercise is unavailable, dancing offers

women opportunities for exercising their bodies, and it is the greatest pleasure, which, in the world of Austen's fiction, is generally indulged in. Austen is known to have loved dancing, and her love is seen everywhere in her novels especially in women's excitement before a ball. The beginning of Volume 2, Chapter 11 in *Emma* most enthusiastically voices how much joy and delight dancing brings to the body and mind:

> It may be possible to do without dancing entirely. Instances have been known of young people passing many, many months successively, without being at any ball of any description, and no material injury accrue either to body or mind; — but when a beginning is made — when the felicities of rapid motion have once been, though slightly, felt — it must be a very heavy set that does not ask for more. (*E* 247)

Before Frank Churchill comes to Highbury, Emma has few opportunities for going to balls. However, the dinner party hosted by the Coles ends with an impromptu ball and she leads the party with a "genuine spirit and enjoyment" (*E* 230). Frank, as her partner, compliments her lively dancing and makes her satisfaction complete: "I must have asked Miss Fairfax, and her languid dancing would not have agreed with me, after your's" (*E* 230). Unfortunately, because of his sudden departure, she has to wait for a considerable time for the next opportunity to dance. But, once she knows "the felicities of rapid motion" (*E* 247), she becomes addicted to it.

In the eighteenth century, country dance characterized by fast steps and tempi was very popular. In Austen's novels there are some references to hint its popularity. In *Northanger Abbey*, while dancing, Henry Tilney says, "I consider a country-dance as an emblem of marriage" (*NA* 76), and surprises Catherine Morland. In *Mansfield Park*, being "pursued by the ceaseless country-dance" (*MP* 281), Fanny leaves the ballroom. Allison Thompson explains that this dance was highly suitable for the young and healthy (n.pag); thus physical strength was required to enjoy balls until the end (see Illustration 2).

On the efficacy of moving the body briskly, in Buchan's opinion, "The love of activity shews itself very early in man. So strong is this principle, that a healthy youth cannot be restrained from exercise, even by the fear of punishment. Our love of motion is surely a strong proof of its utility" (76). In Austen, the love of rapid motion likewise corresponds with

Illustration 2
Rather lively dancing of the 'La Trénis' figure of the Contredanse, from *Le Bon Genre*, Paris (1805)

This is clearly a very energetic dance: the gentleman to the right is mopping the perspiration on his brow; the ladies are raising their legs high.

health and youth. Marianne Dashwood, who loves music and dancing, is glad to hear that Willoughby danced all night without rest. He certainly seems to have an affinity with her, but Brandon's dancing is never mentioned. Of course, by walking and riding, a sufficient amount of exercise can be obtained. But, in joviality and excitement, dancing is far better than walking and riding.

The pleasure and joy of dancing are evident in that even the frail and cheerless Fanny Price heartily enjoys dancing. At her first impromptu ball, she joins four dances successively; while sitting and waiting without a partner, she is impatient for another. Just before the ball in honor of her, she is in "a state so nearly approaching high spirits" (*MP* 272), which

she has never experienced before. Her heightened spirits and unusual cheerfulness indicate the interdependence between the action of the body and the state of the mind. She has liked a quiet evening with Lady Bertram. But, after the ball, she feels that spending the evening tête-à-tête with her exceptionally inactive aunt is "heavy" (*MP* 283). Once having enjoyed the pleasure of physical activity, domestic confinement is insufferable.

Although sanctioned for women of all classes, dancing was criticized by conduct-book writers. They viewed it as a necessary accomplishment for genteel women, but they were fussy about maintaining women's modesty and delicacy during dancing. Gregory comments, "In dancing, the principal points you are to attend to are ease and grace. I would have you to dance with spirit; but never allow yourselves to be so far transported with mirth, as to forget the delicacy of your sex" (26). What Gregory actually meant by the "delicate" dance is unclear, but given his view of women, his model woman should soon get exhausted or suppress her desire to dance more on account of her delicate constitution and modest temper. In addition, the writers were nervous about women's attendance in public balls and their frequent absence from home. This is seen, for instance, in a passage in *Letters to a Young Lady* (1789) by John Bennett: "A woman, who can sparkle and engage the admiration of every beholder, at a birth night or a ball, is not always content with the graver office of managing a family, or the still and sober innocence of domestick [*sic*] scenes" (1: 236). This opinion points to the discouragement of women's physical activities and to the imperative of imprisoning women indoors.

It is apparent in the scenes of her women's active dancing that Austen was against these kinds of discourses. Her women enthusiastically move their bodies to merry music and do not care about fatigue at all. After dancing until late at night, through a good sleep, they are revitalized because fatigue after much pleasure is comfortable. In Bath, after dancing with Henry, Catherine falls asleep soon, and wakes up cheerfully. After a few hours' sleep, Fanny also gets up early to see off her brother William. On the contrary, being unable to attend a ball until the end is very regrettable. Having to quit a ball halfway because of Mr Allen's wish, Catherine is dissatisfied: "her spirits danced within her, as she danced in her chair all the way home" (*NA* 81). These happy and disappointed

experiences of Catherine and Fanny demonstrate that women should fully enjoy active pleasures as long as their physical strength allows, that they have to be careful about exhaustion stemming from inactivity, not from activity, and that delicacy and modesty in the style of conduct books are absurd. In this, Austen's stance is akin to Wollstonecraft's assertion which says:

> Dr Gregory goes much further; he actually recommends dissimulation, and advises an innocent girl to give the lie to her feelings, and not dance with spirit, when gaiety of heart would make her feet eloquent without making her gestures immodest. In the name of truth and common sense, why should not one woman acknowledge that she can take more exercise than another? or, in other words, that she has a sound constitution; and why, to damp innocent vivacity, is she darkly to be told that men will draw conclusions which she little thinks of? (112)

The Harm of Inactivity

The difficulty of middle-class women's finding the opportunity for exercise is coupled with their vulnerability to inactivity. In *Northanger Abbey*, Henry says to Catherine, "a taste for flowers is always desirable in your sex, as a means of getting you out of doors, and tempting you to more frequent exercise than you would otherwise take" (*NA* 174). His opinion, which may well be formed by observing the lifestyle of his mother and sister, suggests that domestic confinement was a daily experience for women. Medical writers repeatedly referred to the vicious circle between inactivity and poor health, especially in women. We have Trotter's observation that "[t]he sedentary life falls more to the lot of the girl than the boy; and is too often encouraged by those preposterous modes of education to which young females are exposed: but certainly a sedentary life may be considered as the chief cause of female ill-health" (238). Like medical writers, as well as by appreciating the benefit of activity, Austen writes of women's need to exercise their bodies vigorously by emphasizing the harm of inactivity.

As previously argued, in Austen's writings there are examples of women's inactive lifestyle. Here I would like to examine the cases of Catherine Morland and Anne Elliot. The change from activity to inactivity Catherine undergoes hints that as girls mature into adults, they lose

the activity and freedom they were allowed in their girlhood. At the age of ten, she is a "noisy and wild" (*NA* 14) girl, who likes "rolling down the green slope at the back of the house" (*NA* 14) and dislikes "confinement and cleanliness" (*NA* 14). Largely thanks to Mrs Morland's laissez-faire education, her formative years offer an ideal environment for health where she enjoys cricket, baseball, riding, running — active outdoor sports. No one else among Austen's women joins in multiple outdoor sports. Just before going to Bath, her life is as active as ever; "in fine weather I am out more than half my time. — Mamma says, I am never within," she says (*NA* 174).

However, after coming back from Bath, her girlhood liberty is no longer given to Catherine. In other words, by entering the world outside home, she is acknowledged as an adult. Mrs Morland is fussy about Catherine's "rambling" (*NA* 240) and "idleness" (*NA* 240), and she pressures her dejected daughter into "a greater inclination for needlework" (*NA* 240). Among womanly accomplishments, needlework was most highly esteemed because it was useful and practical, requiring few brains and inspiring women's penchant for display much less than music or painting. That is, needlework symbolizes stereotyped womanliness: humbleness, and life within home (see Illustration 3). No wonder that conduct-book writers unanimously overvalued needlework, whereas feminists strongly disapproved of it. These two opinions are typical. Fordyce calls it "Fine Arts" (1: 250), and says, "As to Needle-work in particular, we find it spoken of in scripture with commendation. Its beauty and advantage are universally apparent" (1: 249). On the other hand, Wollstonecraft pronounces, "sedentary employments render the majority of women sickly — and false notions of female excellence make them proud of this delicacy, though it be another fetter, that by calling the attention continually to the body, cramps the activity of the mind" (173). Wakefield recommends literature, engraving, music, painting, gardening for upper- and middle-class women, but she does not write of needlework. In short, for conduct-book writers, needlework figures a retiring female virtue, whereas for enlightened women, it represents enslavement to imbecility and passivity. In this light, Mrs Morland's scolding, "there is a time for every thing — a time for balls and plays, and a time for work. You have had a long run of amusement, and now you must try to be useful" (*NA* 240), clearly reveals her intention to direct Catherine to a

Illustration 3
"Young Ladies at Home," by Henry Moses (1823)

Although painted six years after Austen's death, this picture is useful in understanding that middle-class women in her time spent most of daytime indoors over needlework and chatting. Such an inactive lifestyle was recommended in popular conduct books.

standardized middle-class woman's lifestyle by imposing women's normative employment.

In Austen's world, needlework is not criticized as sharply as in *Vindication*: Elizabeth Bennet does it at Netherfield; in Volume 1, Chapter 7 of *Mansfield Park*, we see Fanny sewing clothes to be given to the parish poor;[3] Emma Woodhouse imagines herself knitting carpets in her forties. However, while Catherine is doing enforced needlework, it is obvious that she is damaged by the sedentary work she is not used to:

[3] Sewing garments for the local poor was a part of genteel women's charitable activities.

> Catherine said no more, and, with an endeavour to do right, applied to her work; but, after a few minutes, sunk again, without knowing it herself, into languor and listlessness, moving herself in her chair, from the irritation of weariness, much oftener than she moved her needle. (*NA* 241)

Gilbert and Gubar understand that her restless behavior embodies her powerlessness which enables her to do nothing but wait (144). In addition to apathy, being unable to divert her sorrow and anxiety by active exercise, her body shows a rejection of her sudden imprisonment although she realizes the need to obey Mrs Morland. Fortunately, she is united with Henry before long, and she enters adulthood more happily than by increasingly doing mundane domestic chores. Yet, her listlessness and dismay show that during the course of their maturity, women are liable to suppress their physical vitality unnaturally against their will and inclination because the outlet is denied.

In this light, Anne Elliot's assertion, "We live at home, quiet, confined, and our feelings prey upon us" (*P* 232), demonstrates that social and physical immobility has deprived women of the means to relieve their feelings naturally and healthily and their subdued feelings strike inward to cause both somatic and psychosomatic diseases. Anne's depression is much more painful than Catherine's despondency. Like Jane Fairfax, Anne is not allowed to exert her own decision-making ability: against her will, she had to separate from Wentworth; her plan of retrenchment is ignored; she has to go to Bath, which she dislikes. Because of her insignificant status within the family, her life has been sheltered and joyless. As time goes by, she is numbed by the domestic confinement, fully proved by her giving up dancing. As discussed already, dance is the greatest amusement for Austen's women; except Anne, no other women relinquish opportunities to dance. A girl's reply to Wentworth at an impromptu ball at Uppercross hints that Anne liked dancing while she was engaged to him: "Oh! no, never; she has quite given up dancing" (*P* 72). After separated from him, she discards active pleasures and resigns from an "active post" (*P* 47) in everything. Changes of scenes were recommended for psychosomatic diseases, but her depression has dried up the spirits which could be tempted by novelty. We are told that at the seaside in Lyme Regis, she is enlivened to look "remarkably well; her very regular, very pretty features, having the bloom and freshness of youth restored by the fine wind which had been blowing on her complexion"

(*P* 104). In this scene, Austen is contending that Anne has been suffocating within her confined life and how acutely she has needed open air.

The debate between Anne and Harville is spoken amicably, but, in the novel, this is the only scene where she speaks eloquently to "persuade" someone well-informed. On this debate, scholarly opinions vary. For example, Charles J. Rzepka holds that "Anne Elliot's reflections on woman's traditional exclusion from worldly occupations and activities appears [*sic*] less a critique of the status quo than a resignation to her own emotionally exposed position at the end of the book, a position that, to judge from Austen's use of the harsh word 'fate,' seems almost biologically ordained" (106). Yet, bearing in mind women's frustration caused by their inactive lifestyle, which I have argued so far, Anne's assertions such as "You are forced on exertion. You have always a profession, pursuits, business of some sort or other, to take you back into the world immediately" (*P* 232); "I will not allow books to prove any thing" (*P* 234) voice women's protest and vexation against their weakness, inactivity, and imprisonment written and enforced by men. In addition, in her opinion that "[m]an is more robust than woman, but he is not longer-lived" (*P* 233), she claims that women are potentially as strong as men.

Conclusion

Conduct books written for upper- and middle-class women contextualize a patriarchal aim of socializing inborn sexual difference and enclosing women within a subordinate status and a domestic space. Simone de Beauvoir's observation gets to the core of the tactics in imprinting model femininity into women: "Woman can be defined by her consciousness of her own femininity no more satisfactorily than by saying that she is a female, for she acquires this consciousness under circumstances dependent upon the society of which she is a member" (50–51). Thus the overemphasis of womanly constitution, temper, pursuits, and domain was an indispensable means of encouraging women to internalize stereotyped femininity. These doctrines were so dominant that like the Bingley sisters in *Pride and Prejudice*, the majority of women unthinkingly accepted conventional womanliness.

However, enlightened women were not deafened by the buzzwords

such as "soft" and "delicate." Against the ideas of women's physical weakness, eighteenth-century feminists, although admitting the natural difference in physical strength, argued that body and mind were interactive, and advocated women's entitlement to exercise their bodies as much as men. Rogers says, "Austen rejected systematic feminism" (226). But, Austen's stance over women's right to be active and healthy is the same as those of the feminists: witness Anne's eloquent speech. Also in her fiction, strength in body and mind is interdependent. As seen in Elizabeth's liveliness and Anne's depression, women absolutely need healthy and vigorous activities outside home.

As Wollstonecraft was aware, active exercise was essential for women in releasing themselves from domestic confinement; fortifying their bodies and minds was the first step towards independence. Thus conduct-book writers were nervous about women's outdoor sports. They were afraid of women's experiencing joy outside home, and of their ambition to enter the sphere of public activity. In this social climate, although walking is the most economical means of taking exercise, Austen's women need resolution to venture on walking, and have to combat an imperative which keeps them inactive and dependent. Elizabeth's walk to Netherfield includes not only the issue whether a woman's solitary walk and physical strength are appropriate or not, but also her self-confidence and her decision-making ability — the very qualities which women were not expected to possess. Jane Fairfax's solitary walking might seem less impressive, but her efforts to go for a walk signal her will in fighting against the Highbury community, which is oppressing her freedom. Elizabeth and Jane enact the interconnection between the availability of outdoor exercise to women and their independency.

In addition to the challenging walks of Elizabeth and Jane, Austen's women make full use of their valuable opportunities for exercise and delightfully enjoy moving their bodies briskly. Unlike Wollstonecraft and Wakefield, the scenes of women's physical exercise in Austen's novels are neither polemical nor diplomatic. In a sense, by claiming women's right to be active and healthy for their own good, not for the sake of others, Austen advances the idea of the feminists and suggests the possibility that women are as strong as men.

Yamaguchi University

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